

## **Tennessee Government Initiatives and Educational Success**

This article is a response to the recent release of the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) final report ([www.tennesseescore.org](http://www.tennesseescore.org)) released on October 22, 2009. SCORE is headed by former U.S Senator Bill Frist and other state education leaders. The stated goal of this 33 page report is to make Tennessee's education system the best in the Southeast within five years.

It is generally recognized that home educated students compare favorably to both public and privately schooled students when evaluated on the basis of academic achievement. As home educators, we are naturally concerned about educational reform and efforts to achieve educational success. We are also skeptical of any state efforts to improve education because they inevitably involve secularized educational goals and employment of the coercive power of the state in order to achieve them. Government education is one of the biggest businesses in our state with lots of money and power at stake. Allowing the state authority over the education of our children opens the door to our family, and can lead to immense abuse of state power and abridgement of individual and family freedom. An educational emergency can be used to justify increased educational budgets, higher taxes, and increased government power over individuals and families.

Before we are tempted to embrace the conclusions and goals of the SCORE report, it is important to examine some of the key premises inherent in the report. The SCORE effort seeks to improve education based on a secular, state definition of success that is intended to reinforce and increase state authority over parents and responsibility for children.

### **Defining Education and Academic Success**

Government can only define educational success in the area of academics because of limited ability to produce growth in other essential areas of life. When children are confined in age segregated classrooms for the majority of their first 18 years, they cannot learn character skills, domestic skills, and vocational skills that require family and community involvement in a real world setting. Modern government education seeks to achieve success by replacing the family with government agents and government programs conducted in classrooms in the company of student peers. This approach assumes that human nature is not flawed, and that students will exhibit good behavior and will want to succeed if given the right information and environment. Discussions of God are seen as an impediment to this process and He is not acknowledged or valued. Because government officials and educators are morally confused, discussion of God and the spiritual aspects of human nature are also confused. Schools and educators are unable (legally prohibited) to embrace the One, true God, or to acknowledge absolute truth. Moral and ethical training is muddled, which impacts student behavior, relationships, safety of students and faculty, classroom environment, and academic success. This moral ambiguity results in government educators being unable to define a healthy family, and encourage a family environment that aids learning.

Christian home education rests on different premises. We contend that parents, dependent upon and honoring God, can successfully educate their children in the context of the family with support of a community of believers. Our goal is to assist God in raising each child to love God and others, and to equip each child to be a healthy, responsible adult who is able to function in the context of the family, a body of believers, and the local community. This goal involves character training, religious education, academic education, training in family and domestic skills, and training in basic vocational skills. Isolating and focusing on academic skills to the exclusion of the other objectives results in immature, ill-equipped

adults. Our approach recognizes that human nature is flawed. Students and parents need God in order to experience and express forgiveness, which is best learned in the context of the family and the real world.

### **The Consequences of Wrongly Defining Educational Success**

Paul Harvey has been quoted as saying "Education without religion produces clever devils." As a Christian, he meant Christianity when he used the word "religion." There is plenty of religion in modern schools, but little Biblical Christianity which offers clear moral guidance for students, families, teachers, and schools. Is it any wonder that we are suffering under the schemes and actions of clever devils? A ignorant robber can steal your wallet and the \$100 it contains. A well educated clever devil can bilk individuals, families, businesses, and corporations out of billions of dollars. Education without effective religious and moral training has resulted in a highly educated criminal element.

The solution is to produce healthy families, which are the foundation of any society. It can be argued that extensive time away from parents and family reduces the ability of students to learn necessary relational and family skills. This results in succeeding generations of dysfunctional families, dysfunctional students, a dysfunctional classroom environment, reduced academic success, and a declining culture. Government schools cannot even agree on the definition of a healthy family and must therefore diminish or limit family involvement to that which meets politically correct standards. Because government education by nature can only focus on academics, efforts to improve education will result in "raising academic standards" and increasing the length of school days and years so that these raised goals can be reached. The result is that healthy family life and other key elements of education will be further neglected and academic efforts will fall short.

### **Keeping Our Eyes on the Prize**

Christian families in the public school system will need to be careful to spend extra time on spiritual and family life. This will be very difficult given the time demands that public schools make on students and families. Families in private schools will need to be alert to tendencies to accept the public education definition of success and reproduce it with a "Christian" veneer. Structure and time demands that diminish family life can be just as intense in private schools.

Home educators must be careful to avoid being deceived or intimidated by the public school promises of providing success that parents are not equipped to achieve. We must also not assume that simply being out of the public schools will result in our children developing a relationship with God and a character that honors Him. We are proving that our children can achieve academically, we must be careful to see that they grow into godly adults.

### **Conclusion**

I encourage home educators to study the SCORE report, annual Tennessee education Report Cards, and other plans or recommendations released by state officials. I recommend that we pursue academic success, but not at the cost of personal spiritual success, family success, and character training that equips our children to succeed at life. Highly touted, expensive educational studies and plans may look attractive, but we must remember that most education failure can be traced back to a failure in the parents and the family. The solution to educational failure must also be connected to family success. Healthy families result in healthy students and healthy schools. No government program can compensate for failure in family life.